

THE GIRL AT THE Y

By SEWARD W. HOPKINS

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The up express was due to pass at 1 o'clock, but it did not stop. Graham would not have been in the office at all, only he had some money in the safe and had received orders by wire to sleep in the station that night.

He did not know how much there was. It had come in a sealed package, locked in a small pouch. He knew it was pay day on the new branch then building on the 1st, and this was the 31st.

"Why can't they send a pay car?" asked Graham of himself.

"Too confounded mean," he muttered.

The hour dragged slowly, but Graham found some solace in thinking of Miss Delaine.

Miss Delaine was from Chicago. She was visiting the daughter of Silas Jones, whom she had met at school.

Miss Jones was tall, big and strong; Miss Delaine was dainty.

Miss Jones, with the advantage of her boarding school years, dressed well; Miss Delaine dressed better.

Graham had suddenly felt a peculiar sensation when Miss Delaine got off the loco at Naomi. He knew that Silas was going to have company. He had no idea the company was built more on the fleeting vision than any other.

"If Silas don't feed that girl up he will be all our company," Graham had said. "She's almost gone now."

Graham was a husky fellow and had been at Naomi two months when Miss Delaine appeared. As Graham boarded with Silas he had an opportunity to study her well.

"No more turkey hunts while she's here," he grumbled to himself.

Miss Delaine took the grumble out of him when she proposed a shoot, and the three went to the suburbs, and Miss Delaine brought down five to his three and Miss Jones one.

Miss Delaine proved to have more get up and get in her diminutive body than Graham acknowledged in his five feet ten. She could box big Miss Jones all over the barn floor; she could climb a cherry tree in a light summer frock and come down as neat as she went up; she could swim better than Miss Jones and dive as deep as Graham.

She could play the most charming waltzes and sing the prettiest songs. She had not been at Naomi two weeks before she was singing in the choir, and Graham made the harrowing discovery that he sang bass.

So on this night Graham consoled himself by thinking gloomy thoughts about Miss Delaine.

"I'd be a fool to ask her and a brute to expect her to accept if I did ask." He said this with almost a groan. "Why couldn't it have been Fan?" Fan was Miss Jones. "But, no; she'll marry Larkins, and if Miss Delaine was poor I'd marry her."

He knew she was rich. She had often spoken about "our railroad." James Delaine was president of the Q. & B. Disconsolate, he smoked his pipe. He wondered how much money there was in the safe. He knew the payroll must be long.

He had read last Sunday's paper a dozen times and gone off to sleep and nearly fallen off the chair which he had tilted back. He had left the door open for air. The night was warm.

"Hello there, young feller!" came a voice. He turned toward the door and looked into the barrel of a big revolver. "Hold up your hands!"

"Er—I am agent here," stammered Graham.

"Oh, we know that. You keep yer mouth shut. We'll do the rest."

"I won't submit to robbery, if that is what you mean," said Graham.

"Robbery, eh? Won't submit, eh? Well, young feller, ye don't look much like a fool. Under the circumstances I wouldn't advise yer to be one ever, if ye do know how. I've got two partners here, and the first yawn out of ye will mean a game o' shootin' big. Now Jim."

Another fellow came in and went through Graham's pockets.

"Now, young feller," said the leader after Jim had deposited an express revolver on the table, "just tell us the combination to that safe."

"I refuse."

"What did I say about bein' a fool? Say, I'll give you three minutes to make up your mind. You'll either give us the combination or I'll put a hole through you. Now, Jim."

Graham was silent.

Jim was working at the safe. The third came in and grinned at the picture of Graham made.

"Pretty boy," he said.

Graham opened his mouth to speak.

"Ain't no use sayin' anything unless it's the combination."

"Aw, kill him. We can blow open the safe."

Graham knew that these men meant business. They would as soon take a life as eat. He could see his revolver lying where Jim had placed it.

If only he could divert the leader's attention while he grabbed his own revolver he would take a chance. Graham was no coward. He fixed his eyes on the door, nodding to some imaginary person behind the leader. The bandit laughed.

"See that, Bill? He don't know how old that trick is. Young feller, that trick was old before you were born. Give us another."

"It is no trick!" shouted Graham. "I

am not afraid of you, but don't let that bear in here."

He looked frightened. The one called Bill looked. Graham had moved a few steps forward.

"Are you goin' to open that safe?"

"I tell you to shoot him," said Bill.

"He's tried to fool us twice. No bear outside."

Graham could see the desperado growing blacker. He knew that after he had opened the safe for them they would shoot him to prevent identification. It had been done many times before.

He resolved to sell his life fighting rather than yielding. He suddenly darted toward his revolver, but the leader was too quick. He had been expecting that. The revolver was simply a lie. He fired, and Graham fell with a bullet in his side.

"Now, hang you, if you want a show for your life give us the combination."

Graham was gasping. He was waiting for the next shot that would kill him.

Suddenly there was a sharp crack—the smashing of glass—another—and another. The leader was down, with a bullet in his heart, shot through the back. Jim lay writhing near the safe. Bill had pitched forward and was grasping the side for support. Then an apparition appeared at the door.

A bit of a girl stood there, her face white, a rifle in her hands. She was so small she looked like a child. Graham saw her.

"You—you, Miss Delaine—at half past 1? How—how?"

She calmly gazed at the result of her lightning work.

"To tell you the truth, I was afraid and came here to sleep. After you left"—she was examining his wound while she spoke—"Charley Jones came over on horseback and said Mr. Jones' brother was dying. I was out in the orchard, and they could not find me and thought probably I was with you. I returned to the house and could not get in. I had left my key in the house. I managed to get the window open and went in that way, but I was afraid to go to sleep. I could sit up without fear, because I always feel safe with my rifle. But I was dead tired after the dance last night, and I wanted to sleep. I thought I'd risk the talk and come here. It was nearest. I heard the shot and knew you were in trouble. I ran and got here just in time. Can you run the sender?"

"I guess so," he said feebly.

"Wire to order that express to stop here." She even knew the stations.

Graham dragged himself to the table, got his call and clicked off the message.

At 2 the express came roaring and rumbling in.

"What the mischief's the row here?" bawled a heavy voice, and a powerful man in a silk hat and black frock coat stood with mouth agape while a fraction of what would make a fair-sized girl slid unconsciously to the floor.

"I guess so," he said feebly.

"Wire to order that express to stop here." She even knew the stations.

Graham dragged himself to the table, got his call and clicked off the message.

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